

1. Issues and Opportunities

1.1 Introduction

The Town of Sand Lake is defined by the people who live and work there, the houses and businesses, the parks and natural features, its past, its present, and its future. No matter the location, change is the one certainty that visits all places. No community is immune to its effects. How a community changes, how that change is perceived, and how change is managed are the subjects of community comprehensive planning. An understanding of both the town's history and its vision for the future is essential to making sound decisions. The foundation of comprehensive planning relies on a balance between the past, present, and future by addressing four fundamental questions:

1. Where is the community now?
2. How did the community get here?
3. Where does the community want to be in the future?
4. How does the community get to where it wants to be?

The *Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan* will guide community decision making in the Town of Sand Lake for the next 20 to 25 years. The town's complete comprehensive plan is composed of two documents. This *Plan Recommendations Report* contains the results of the town's decision making process as expressed by goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations. The *Inventory and Trends Report* is the second component of the comprehensive plan and contains all of the background data for Burnett County and the Town of Sand Lake. Both documents follow the same basic structure by addressing nine comprehensive planning elements in chapters one through nine:

1. Issues and Opportunities
2. Population and Housing
3. Transportation
4. Utilities and Community Facilities
5. Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources
6. Economic Development
7. Intergovernmental Cooperation
8. Land Use
9. Implementation

Burnett County began a multi-jurisdictional planning effort in 2008 after being awarded a Comprehensive Planning Grant by the Wisconsin Department of Administration. The Town of Sand Lake joined Burnett County in this effort along with 10 other towns, and two villages for a total of 14 participating units of government. For more information on the multi-jurisdictional planning process, please refer to Chapter 1 of the *Inventory and Trends Report*.

The *Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan* meets the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning law, Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001. This law requires all municipalities (counties, villages, towns, and villages) to adopt a comprehensive plan by the year 2010 if they

wish to make certain land use decisions. After the year 2010, any municipality that regulates land use must make their zoning, land division, shoreland and floodplain zoning, and official mapping decisions in a manner that is consistent with the community's comprehensive plan.

The Town of Sand Lake developed this comprehensive plan in response to the issues it must address and the opportunities it wishes to pursue. The Issues and Opportunities element of the comprehensive plan provides perspective on the planning process, public participation, trends and forecasts, and the overall goals of the community.

1.2 Plan Summary

The Town of Sand Lake is an unincorporated town in southeast Burnett County. There are no incorporated villages within the town, and the Town is situated east of the Village of Webster and is bordered by the Towns of Jackson, Rusk, La Follette, and Meenon. Please reference Map 1-1 for the regional setting.

With a year-round population of about 571 and a low population density, the Town of Sand Lake can best be described as rural. As is typical in Burnett County, the landscape is characterized mainly by its natural features including large tracts of wetlands and woodlands, and by its surface water which includes 15 named lakes. Residential development is primarily clustered around the town's water resources, with a scattering of development along the existing road network. Importantly, nearly half of homes in the Town of Sand Lake are seasonal residences. The population is expected to remain steady, with the Wisconsin Department of Administration projecting an increase of 4 new residents a year. Future development is also projected to remain steady, with an increase of about 3 houses per year. Residential housing is the primary form of projected future development.

Public participation during the planning process identified the town's primary concerns and areas to be addressed by its comprehensive plan. Top issues and opportunities as identified by the planning committee and town citizens include the protection of natural resources and rural character, the need for improved land use planning and managing rural development regulation, and pursuing opportunities for economic development. Town of Sand Lake residents responded to two planning process surveys, and the strongest areas of consensus include the following:

- ♦ Increasing housing affordability
- ♦ Improving information technology infrastructure
- ♦ Preserving natural resources in the Town

The *Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan* sets the stage to successfully balance and achieve the desires expressed in the goals, objectives, policies and recommendations found in this document. This will be accomplished by creating an improved system in which development takes place. This will incorporate many innovative techniques involving development density and lot size management as well as creative subdivision design. Paramount in the plan is the careful placement of residential development with regard to the community's natural features and infrastructure

The Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan sets the stage to successfully balance and achieve results based on the community's vision.

investments. The town's plan will help achieve a desirable future by directing the most intensive development to areas that are suitable for such development. The overall intent is to preserve the features, character, and opportunity that the residents of Sand Lake enjoy today while managing the long term physical development in concert with the market forces and land use regulation that shape it. The best agricultural lands, natural resource rich areas, and areas that support outdoor recreation opportunities will be preserved as such for future generations, but will still allow development at lower densities.

Town of Sand Lake 2030 Vision

The Town of Sand Lake planning committee developed a vision statement as a part of the comprehensive planning process. Based on the town's highest priority issues and opportunities, the group identified what they would like to change, create, or preserve for the future of their community. The vision statement then expresses which issues are the most important for the town to resolve and which opportunities are most important to pursue over the long term.

Vision Statement

It is the year 2030. In the Town of Sand Lake we...

1. Value the quality of life reflected by our natural resources – lakes, rivers, wood, wildlife – and our rural lifestyle.
2. Value the sustainability of public services and work to provide them in financially responsible ways that assure the public safety of our community.

The Town of Sand Lake's vision for the future is further expressed in its goal statements for each of the comprehensive planning elements. The town's planning goals are broad statements of community values and public preferences for the long term (20 years or more). Implementation of this comprehensive plan will result in the achievement of these goals by the year 2030. For further detail on these goals, including related objectives, refer to the respective element of this comprehensive plan.

Housing Goals

Goal 1: Support Burnett County's efforts to facilitate opportunities for an adequate housing supply that will meet the needs of current and future residents to have access to a full range of housing choices for all income levels, age groups, and special needs.

Goal 2: To guide new housing development into areas that can be efficiently served in a fashion that does not impact scarce natural resources.

Goal 3: Support housing development that maintains the attractiveness and rural character of the town.

Goal 4: Support the maintenance and rehabilitation of the town's existing housing stock.

Transportation Goals

Goal 1: Support a safe, efficient, and environmentally sound transportation system which, through its location, capacity, and design, will effectively serve the existing land use development pattern and meet anticipated transportation demand generated by existing and planned land uses.

Goal 2: Support safe and efficient multi-modal transportation systems where appropriate.

Goal 3: Promote cooperation and coordination between state, county, villages, and towns in developing the Town transportation system.

Utilities and Community Facilities Goals

Goal 1: Support the efficiency, quality, and coordinated planning of town government, community facilities and services, and utilities.

Goal 2: Consider functionality and accessibility of parks and recreational facilities when developed.

Goal 3: Ensure proper disposal of wastewater to protect groundwater and surface water resources.

Goal 4: Ensure that the town's water supply has sufficient capacity, remains drinkable, and is available to meet the needs of residents, businesses, industry, and agriculture when considering new development.

Goal 5: Ensure that roads, structures, and other improvements are reasonably protected from flooding.

Goal 6: Encourage effective solid waste disposal and recycling services that protect the public health, natural environment, and general appearance of land use in the town.

Goal 7: Ensure the provision of reliable, efficient, and well-planned utilities to adequately serve existing and planned development.

Goal 8: Support access to quality health and child care facilities.

Goal 9: Ensure a level of police protection, fire protection, and emergency services that meets the needs of existing and planned future development patterns.

Goal 10: Promote quality schools and access to educational opportunities.

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources Goals

Agricultural Resources

Goal 1: Maintain the viability, operational efficiency, and productivity of the town's agricultural resources for current and future generations.

Goal 2: Balance the protection of farmland with the exercise of development rights.

Natural Resources

Goal 1: Encourage responsible management of the Town's natural resources.

Goal 2: Protect and improve the quality and quantity of the town's ground and surface water.

Goal 3: Preserve the natural and scenic qualities of lakes and shorelines in the town.

Goal 4: Balance future development with the protection of natural resources.

Goal 5: Protect air quality.

Goal 6: Preserve and protect woodlands and forest resources for their economic, aesthetic, and environmental values.

Goal 7: Balance future needs for the extraction of mineral resources with potential adverse impacts on the town.

Cultural Resources

Goal 1: Preserve the rural character as defined by scenic beauty, a variety of landscapes, undeveloped lands, forests, water resources, wildlife, farms, rural and small town atmosphere, buildings integrated with the landscape, and enjoyment of these surroundings.

Goal 2: Preserve significant historical and cultural lands, sites, neighborhoods, and structures that contribute to community identity and character.

Goal 3: Strengthen opportunities for youth in the town including youth-oriented activities and facilities and additional job opportunities.

Economic Development Goals

Goal 1: Maintain and enhance opportunities for resource based industries dependent on rural lands and provide opportunity for compatible economic growth and development

Goal 2: Support efforts to attract, retain, and expand quality businesses and industries that will improve the employment and personal income base of the Town.

Goal 3: Maintain or improve the utility, communication, and transportation infrastructure systems that promote economic development.

Goal 4: Encourage a quality workforce to strengthen existing businesses and maintain a high standard of living.

Intergovernmental Cooperation Goals

Goal 1: Encourage a quality workforce to strengthen existing businesses and maintain a high standard of living.

Land Use Goals

Goal 1: Guide the efficient use of land through a unified vision of resource limitations and town goals and objectives.

Implementation Goals

Goal 1: Promote integration of the comprehensive plan policies and recommendations with the ordinances and implementation tools that affect the Town of Sand Lake.

1.3 Comprehensive Plan Development Process and Public Participation

The Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning legislation specifies that the governing body for a unit of government must prepare and adopt written procedures to foster public participation in the comprehensive planning process. This includes open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided, in every stage of the preparation of a comprehensive plan. Public participation includes wide distribution of proposed drafts, plan alternatives, and proposed amendments of the comprehensive plan. Public participation includes opportunities for members of the public to send written comments on the plan to the applicable governing body, and a process for the governing body to respond. The Town of Sand Lake has adopted a *Public Participation and Education Plan* in order to comply with the requirements of Section 66.1001(4)(a) of the Wisconsin Statutes. The town's adopted *Public Participation and Education Plan* is found in Appendix A.

The Burnett County comprehensive planning process was designed to encourage extensive grassroots, citizen-based input. Not only were public outreach tools and events utilized, but citizens were directly involved in writing their own local comprehensive plans, as well as the county comprehensive plan. Please refer to Sections 1.3 through 1.5 of the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report* for further details on the plan development and public participation processes.

In addition to the public participation process described in the *Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report*, the process of adopting the *Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan* included several public participation activities. These include Sand Lake public informational meetings, Planning Committee, Plan Commission, and Town Board action, a public hearing, and the distribution of recommended and final plan documents.

Public Informational Meetings

In accordance with the County planning process, Sand Lake used Plan Commission meetings, cluster meetings, and public informational meetings as part of the planning process. Sand Lake participated in six integrated cluster meetings at the county level, and held several local plan commission meetings as part plan development. Each participating community worked through a 'base package' process of meetings and local work sessions as facilitated by Foth and Burnett County. The cluster planning process provided the framework to enable each community to work through the planning process and hit key plan development benchmarks while allowing enough schedule flexibility to facilitate local, issue specific meetings.

The county also held periodic public informational meetings as part of the integrated meeting process to allow for efficient communication to the general public and ensure access to information as key points during plan development. Each public informational meeting included both county and local information and was attended by both local and county officials. Please refer to the Issues and Opportunities chapter of the Burnett County Inventory and Trends Report for more detail.

Plan Commission and Town Board Action

On [REDACTED], the Town of Sand Lake Plan Commission discussed the draft comprehensive plan and passed resolution number [REDACTED] recommending approval of the plan to the Town Board. After completion of the public hearing, the Town of Sand Lake Town Board discussed and adopted the comprehensive plan by passing ordinance number [REDACTED] on [REDACTED].

Public Hearing

On [REDACTED], a public hearing was held on the recommended *Town of Sand Lake Year 2030 Comprehensive Plan* at the town hall. The hearing was preceded by Class 1 notice and public comments were accepted for 30 days prior to the hearing. Verbal and written comments were taken into consideration by the Town Board before taking action to adopt the plan.

Distribution of Plan Documents

Both the recommended draft and final plan documents were provided to adjacent and overlapping units of government, the local library, and the Wisconsin Department of Administration in accordance with the *Public Participation and Education Plan* found in Appendix A.

1.4 Town of Sand Lake Issues and Opportunities

The initial direction for the comprehensive planning process was set by identifying community issues and opportunities. Issues were defined as challenges, conflicts, or problems that a community is currently facing or is likely to face in the future. Opportunities were defined as the positive aspects of a community that residents are proud of and value about their community. These could either be current positive aspects of a community, or have the potential to be created in the future.

In the first cluster meetings held December 15-16, 2008, the Town of Sand Lake Planning Commission Members and community representatives reviewed a base set of issues and opportunities developed by the County Planning Committee. These issues and opportunities were then revised by the participants to reflect the Town's unique conditions. After the full list was developed, each participant voted on the statements to establish a sense of priority. The following issues and opportunities were identified:

Table 1-1
Issues and Opportunities Identification
Town of Sand Lake

Issues Identified by the Town of Sand Lake	Votes
Technology Issues County has good technology infrastructure; leverage technology – wireless, DSL, fiber optics, internet (could be a sub-set of communication).	9
Housing Issues Affordability; scattered development. Land use regulation.	9
Natural Resources Preservation and enhancement to spur economic growth while maintaining Northwood's character. The perception is that access to public lands, Recreation, wildlife is being threatened. Furthermore, there is concern over loss of woods, "green spaces", and how sensitive areas such as lakes are becoming overdeveloped.	6
Lakefront Water Issues Demand for lake front property and lake access has caused increased development pressure on lakes in the County. Many lakes are threatened with overcrowding and the problems associated with overuse such as public recreation conflicts, surface water use conflicts, adverse impacts to sensitive riparian, and littoral habitats. (Could be a sub-set of Natural Resource issues.)	6
Transportation Issues Infrastructure investment (highways and highway building), work in opposite direction by implementing local resources; no major highway or access to a major airport; location not on interstate highway system (rail access?).	6

Issues Identified by the Town of Sand Lake	Votes
Maintain Burnett County's Northwoods Character/Quality of Life The perception is this is currently being threatened by increasing development, population, tourism and poor development practices. The General character of the County is being affected by unsightly development and land use conflicts. A widespread perception that existing land use controls and guidance have not kept pace with the changing conditions. The issue needs to be defined and then develop strategies to protect that definition.	2
Economic Development that is Appropriate to the Town of Sand Lake Leverage the potential strengths to spur economic growth and mitigate the weaknesses that hinder economic growth. The lack of retail stores, limited number of manufacturing jobs lack of markets for wood and contractors and the lack of trained professionals to run businesses needs to be leveraged against the ability to generate marketing dollars for expanded tourism, international tourism, and work more closely with the tribal enterprises. Strategies are needed.	1
How to Pay for Them Simultaneously, strategies are needed to tap into the County's strong property tax base, low business tax structure; ability to leverage grants to off-set local taxes and tap into state and federal programs, increase revenue from forest, room tax, highway, fees, develop new fee for services.	1
Services The need for government services is increasing while simultaneously, the traditional mechanisms which support those services are being cut. This is leading to increased workloads due to lack of resources (staff, time, funds, space, time to train, time to plan, reactive rather than proactive, competition for scarce resources, etc.). It is expected that this trend will continue for some time into the future. Strategies are needed to determine which services to eliminate, reduce, or leverage with technology (self service). Strategies are needed to increase efficiencies through cooperation with other units of governments and consolidation of services. Strategies are also needed to determine which service to grow or invest in.	
Skills Development Address the lack of technical skills and ability to receive training to upgrade skills; strategy to tap into the skilled, educated secondary homeowners (this could be a sub-set of economic development)	
Youth Issues Brain drain, Creating opportunities for youth that will keep them in the Town of Sand Lake; lack of opportunities for youth (maybe causing brain-drain), lack of funding for schools, declining enrollments, lack of state funding, etc.	
Demographic Shifts and its Impacts Loss of youth increase of elderly. We are losing young people who need work, while simultaneously gaining older people who need services. Need a strategy to keep young people here, attract high tech individuals to area and tap into their skills.	

Issues Identified by the Town of Sand Lake	Votes
Elderly Issues Retirement and turnover (staff and Board), increasing demand for government services	
Communication Improvements It is perceived that overall communication needs to improve; poor communication between County and Tribe; inter-departmental, between state and county, with other agencies, the public, the unions, etc.	

1.5 Issues and Opportunities Policies and Recommendations

Policies and recommendations build on goals and objectives by providing more focused responses to the issues that the town is concerned about. Policies and recommendations become primary tools the town can use in making land use decisions. Many of the policies and recommendations cross element boundaries and work together toward overall implementation strategies. Refer to Section 9.5 for an explanation of the strategies cited as sources for many of the policies and recommendations.

Policies identify the way in which activities are conducted in order to fulfill the goals and objectives. Policies that direct action using the word “shall” are advised to be mandatory and regulatory aspects of the implementation of the comprehensive plan. In contrast, those policies that direct action using the words “will” or “should” are advisory and intended to serve as a guide. “Will” statements are considered to be strong guidelines, while “should” statements are considered loose guidelines.

- I0 1. The Town shall conduct business related to land use decisions utilizing an open public meeting process and by considering its comprehensive plan.
- I0 2. The Town shall strive to strengthen communication and relationships with bordering towns and Burnett County.
- I0 3. The Town development review process will be used to ensure decisions are in agreement with the Town comprehensive plan.